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U.S. NAVAL FORCES IN JAPAN:  
IS FORWARD BASING STILL REQUIRED?

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: Richard K. Mayne

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## REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED		1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS	
2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY		3. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF REPORT DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A; APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED.	
2b. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE		5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)	
4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)		7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION	
6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT	6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (if applicable) C	7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)	
6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) NAVAL WAR COLLEGE NEWPORT, R.I. 02841		9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER	
8a. NAME OF FUNDING/SPONSORING ORGANIZATION	8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (if applicable)	10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS	
8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)		PROGRAM ELEMENT NO.	PROJECT NO.
		TASK NO.	WORK UNIT ACCESSION NO.
11. TITLE (Include Security Classification) U.S. NAVAL FORCES IN JAPAN: IS FORWARD BASING STILL REQUIRED? (v)			
12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) MAYNE, RICHARD KAY, COMMANDER, UNITED STATES NAVY			
13a. TYPE OF REPORT FINAL	13b. TIME COVERED FROM TO	14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day) 1993 MAY 17	15. PAGE COUNT 29
16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.			
17. COSATI CODES		18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)	
FIELD	GROUP	JAPAN, FORWARD BASING, U.S. NAVAL FORCES, PACIFIC SECURITY	
19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number) The need for continued forward basing of U.S. naval forces in Japan is considered against stated U.S. policy objectives in the Asia-Pacific region. The perception the end of the Cold War has reduced the threat to U.S. vital interests in the region has brought into question the need for forward basing of naval forces at current or reduce levels. Primary emphasis is placed on the political and military requirements behind forward basing in Japan rather than addressing specific ports or forces. Nations in the region see a strong and continuous U.S. naval presence as a stabilizing force to counter the tenuous security environment that currently exists. Forward basing also provides the Pacific Command critical advantages in the areas of forward presence and crisis response. The United States continues to maintain a policy of engagement in the Asia-Pacific region which is best served by continued forward basing of U.S. naval forces in Japan.			
20. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED <input type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT. <input type="checkbox"/> DTIC USERS		21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED	
22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL CHAIRMAN, OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT		22b. TELEPHONE (Include Area Code) 841-3414	22c. OFFICE SYMBOL C

Abstract of  
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# **U.S. NAVAL FORCES IN JAPAN: IS FORWARD BASING STILL REQUIRED?**

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The United States has maintained a continuous, forward deployed naval presence in Japan for over 40 years including an aircraft carrier for the last 20 years. In the past the Soviet Union, China, North Korea and Japan itself, provided sufficient threats to the United States to justify the costs (manpower and monetary) involved. Now, however, in view of the rapidly changing post Cold War world, the utility of these bases and the monetary cost to U.S. taxpayers are being questioned by congress and by the general public. There is also a segment of the Japanese populace questioning the relevance of U.S. military power in the region and specifically our presence at Japanese bases. There are, however, many nations in the Asia-Pacific region which favor continued basing of U.S. naval forces in Japan viewing it as a stabilizing force. Is it still in the best interests of the United States to maintain naval forces at Japanese bases with decreasing budgets and force levels? This paper will review the need for continued forward homeporting of U.S. naval forces in Japan against stated U.S. policy objectives in the Asia-Pacific region with primary emphasis on the U.S.-Japanese relationship. I will concentrate on the policy behind forward

basing in Japan rather than addressing the specific ports or forces to be deployed. Recognizing that decreased force levels at forward bases is a reality, I will limit the discussion to maintaining forward based presence in Japan or withdrawal from forward bases in Japan.

## CHAPTER II

### U.S. COMMITTED TO AN ENGAGEMENT POLICY

Policy. The *National Security Strategy of the United States* lists the five overriding interests for the United States:

- The survival of the United States as a free and independent nation, with its fundamental values intact and its institutions and people secure.
- Global and regional stability which encourages peaceful change and progress.
- Open, democratic and representative political systems world wide.
- An open international trading and economic system which benefits all participants.
- An enduring global faith in America--that it can and will lead in a collective response to the world's crises<sup>1</sup>

These interests drive the development of our national military strategy with its foundation in Strategic Deterrence and Defense, Forward Presence, Crisis Response, and Reconstitution.<sup>2</sup>

Strategy. With the breakup of the Soviet Union the U.S. military lost its primary yardstick for developing military strategy. We have had to rethink "the threat" and how to apply our military forces to meet it. In the Asia-Pacific region, the considerations of political, economic and military concerns overlap more than in any other region. It is this overlapping that provides a more definitive and compelling requirement for a U.S. presence in the region - and more specifically a forward based presence in Japan.

The Department of Defense outlined the following security policy for the Asia-Pacific region in support of our national interests: (1) Continued U.S. engagement in the region; (2) Strong bilateral security arrangements; (3) Modest but capable forward-deployed U.S. forces; (4) A sufficient overseas support structure; (5) Greater responsibility sharing by our partners in the region; and (6) Deliberate policies of defense cooperation.<sup>3</sup> These requirements coupled with political and economic concerns are the basis for U.S. forward presence in the region.

Engagement Policy. The U.S. is deeply engaged in the Asia-Pacific region politically, economically and militarily. Originally, this engagement was driven by the U.S. vital interest to deter Soviet/Communist expansion into the region. U.S. engagement was primarily of a political/military nature until the past decade but the growth of U.S. trade in the region has added economic concerns as an element of our regional policy.

The importance of the region to U.S. interests was evidenced by President Bush's five-nation Asia-Pacific visit in January of 1992. During his stopover in Singapore to finalize a base-access agreement, President Bush reaffirmed U.S. resolve to stay engaged in the region when he said, "We are a Pacific Power, and we are going to stay involved in the Pacific."<sup>4</sup> This stance has not been altered by President Clinton.



As noted earlier, U.S. economic ties to the region, especially with Japan, are a major motivator for maintaining our influence in the area. The United States exported almost \$130 billion to the region in 1991 with over \$300 billion in two-way trade (approx. 1/3 larger than Europe).<sup>5</sup> Japan is also the United States' second largest trading partner in the world (Canada is first) and between the two they control 40% of the world's wealth and produce 85% of cutting-edge technology.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, Japan is the leading investor in the Asia-Pacific region, a fact welcomed on an economic basis but cause of much concern on a military basis to the other countries of the region.

## CHAPTER III

### REGIONAL SECURITY CONCERNS

Security Environment. U.S. security involvement in the region has grown through the years to include numerous security agreements with countries in the area (five of seven formal U.S. military alliances are in the Asia-Pacific region).<sup>1</sup> Assistant Secretary of State Richard Solomon characterized the U.S. security role in the region this way, "The vast majority of countries in East Asia and the Pacific continue to look to the U.S. to play the role of regional balancer, honest broker and ultimate guarantor of stability and security. We share this view and accept the responsibility."<sup>2</sup> Even with this commitment, phased reduction of U.S. military forces in the Pacific, U.S. public sentiment leaning towards isolationism, and the Philippines base closures are sending a different signal to the region.

As mentioned earlier, the U.S. first approached the region on a political/military basis to curb Soviet expansion. Although the breakup of the Soviet Union diminished the primary threat to the United States in the Asia-Pacific region, there are still several major areas of concern which call for a continued U.S. forward presence in the region.

Russia. The former Soviet Pacific Fleet, now under Russian control, is second only to the U.S. Pacific Fleet in size and capability and it contains an extensive nuclear

arsenal. Also, Russian Government political and military intentions in the region are still unclear. On the economic side, Russian President Yeltsin has approached South Korea and Japan to open diplomatic channels in hopes of gaining foreign investment and aid for Russia and other members of the Confederation of Independent States (CIS). Overtures to Japan for assistance have been stalled due to Japan's demand for return of the Kurile Islands (taken by the Soviets at the end of World War Two) in exchange for economic aid and the Russian's unwillingness to return them. Neither ex-President Gorbachev nor President Yeltsin have been able to make headway on this issue.' Although Russian military capabilities in the region are still extensive, it appears at this time they are interested more in the economic benefits to be gained from the Asia-Pacific region than in any aggressive ventures.

North Korea. North Korea is by far the most problematic of U.S. security concerns in the region. The specter of a likely North Korean nuclear weapons program and the North's refusal to allow international inspections of its nuclear energy programs make the situation troubling to say the least.' The situation worsen in March, 1993, when North Korea withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, broke off reunification talks with South Korea, and declared themselves in a "semi-state" of war with the United States and South Korea.' North Korea's aggressive military posturing caused General Robert W. Riscassi, commander of U.S. Forces, Korea,

to state he was ". . . increasingly concerned that North Korea could slide into an attack against South Korea."<sup>6</sup> The political conditions have deteriorated to the point the United States felt compelled (with urging from China) to take part in high level talks with China, North Korea, and South Korea to defuse the situation.<sup>7</sup> The fact that Russia is no longer providing economic aid to North Korea and China has cut aid dramatically is reassuring but is considered by many experts to be destabilizing to the faltering North Korean economy.<sup>8</sup>

The bilateral security agreements with South Korea and Japan obligate the United States to come to their aid in the event of hostilities but growing South Korean military capabilities allowed for some U.S. troop reductions. Further reductions, however, have been suspended until North Korea is more forthcoming on the nuclear programs question.<sup>9</sup>

China. China will continue to be of concern as it has the potential and military capability to put the region at risk. China's recently announced defense budget for 1993 showed a 15% increase over 1992 and a 50% increase since 1988. This dramatic increase in military spending is viewed with much concern by other regional states who fear China is trying to use military intimidation to resolve seven ongoing border disputes in its favor.<sup>10</sup>

China has taken advantage of the breakup of the Soviet Union by buying modern Soviet military equipment at

cut-rate prices with plans to acquire an aircraft carrier. Admiral Charles Larson, commander of the Pacific Command, believes these new weapons give China a power projection capability which it may use to back claims to islands in the South China Sea.<sup>11</sup>

One area where China is flexing its military muscle is the Spratly Islands which straddle the primary sea lanes through the South China Sea leading to the Malaccan Straits and the Indian Ocean (the primary route for Middle East oil coming to the Pacific). The seabed around the island group is considered a rich and untapped source of oil and hydrocarbons.<sup>12</sup> China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Indonesia, Brunei, the Philippines, and Malaysia all claim sovereignty over portions of the island group and all have established some level of military presence in the islands. China, Malaysia, and the Philippines have actually started construction on airfields in the islands and China maintains a formidable naval presence in the area.<sup>13</sup> A conference to discuss the Spratlys was held in July 1991 at which all the claimants tentatively agreed that all territorial disputes in the area should be resolved peacefully. China, however, has continued a military build up in the area which could ultimately lead to confrontation.<sup>14</sup>

Another area long a concern of the United States is the continuing potential for confrontation between China and Taiwan. Experts agree an invasion of Taiwan by China is unlikely, however, lower level confrontations are still

considered highly possible (a naval blockade for example).<sup>15</sup> There is some easing of tensions in the China-Taiwan deadlock with the nations currently involved in economic cooperation talks.

Potential Conflicts. The above situations are not the only areas of conflict in the region--the area is rife with border disputes and insurgencies which could influence regional stability including: civil war in Cambodia; border disputes between Indonesia and New Guinea; internal unrest in Sri Lanka; long standing disputes between India and Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh; and the border disputes between China and its neighbors noted above.

Weapons Proliferation. Two aspects of weapons proliferation associated with the region are of critical concern to the United States. First is the export of high technology weapons regionally and internationally by China, North Korea and most recently by members of the CIS. Of particular concern are missiles and technologies for weapons of mass destruction.

The news media recently reported on a Central Intelligence Agency report confirming a North Korean agreement to sell a newly developed medium range missile to Iran. The 600-mile range Nodong I missile will be ready for export by the end of 1993 according to the report.<sup>16</sup> Significantly, the Nodong I will put Japan within North Korean missile range. China and Russia have agreed to abide by the Missile Technology Control

Regime but continue to sell arms in and out of the region and North Korea has refused to sign the agreement.<sup>17</sup>

The second area of concern is the increasing procurement of high technology weapon systems by the militaries within the region. There is no doubt the security umbrella provided by the United States over the years has allowed the region's countries to concentrate on domestic concerns with relatively small defense expenditures. Now, however, with growing economies and the perception of possible U.S. force reductions in or withdrawal from the region, many countries are spending more on defense programs to upgrade their capabilities to protect their borders, territorial waters, and access to the seas. Asian countries made 35% of all major weapons purchases in 1992 with Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand all increasing defense expenditures in 1991-92.<sup>18</sup> The latter three nations all showed double digit increases for 1993.<sup>19</sup> Due to the maritime nature of the region this modernization is especially evident in the naval and air force branches of the region's military forces.<sup>20</sup> Many of the countries in the region have also extended their exclusive economic zones farther seaward in hopes of future development in the area of seabed resources (as in the Spratly Islands).<sup>21</sup>

U.S. Regional Security Policy. The Clinton Administration has taken a position of encouraging Asian-Pacific nations to solve their own security problems and plans on the United States being an active participant in such efforts.<sup>22</sup> This

position is a departure from past U.S. policy which favored direct security ties between the United States and individual allies in the region. The Administration's commitment to the new policy is evidenced by the participation, at the Assistant Secretary of State level, in an upcoming meeting of the Association of South East Asian Nations.



## CHAPTER IV

### JAPAN

Treaty Obligations. In no other part of the world are U.S. interests tied so closely with a single country as is the case in the Asia-Pacific region. The U.S.-Japan relationship is considered by many to be the key to future U.S. success in the region. Admiral Charles Larson, Commander-in-Chief Pacific (CINCPAC), stated, "The U.S.-Japan bilateral relationship is the single most important in the Pacific Command."<sup>1</sup>

A key aspect of the bilateral relationship is the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty. The Japanese Constitution limits its military to a strictly defensive role and forbids production, possession, or foreign introduction of nuclear weapons into Japan.<sup>2</sup> The constitutional limits on the military forced Japan to seek security alliances to protect its interests. The result was the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty first signed in 1951. The treaty has undergone several revisions but the current version, approved in 1960, ensures continued basing rights for U.S. forces and obligates the U.S. to defend Japan against attack. It is important to note, however, the Treaty does not obligate Japan to defend the United States. The Treaty also requires the United States to receive Japanese permission prior to conducting any combat operations from the bases. This requirement has never been

rigidly interpreted nor enforced by the Japanese to limit U.S. use of the bases for logistics staging during actions such as the Vietnam or Persian Gulf Wars.<sup>3</sup>

Under the terms of the Treaty, Japan is responsible for the air and land defense of its own territories and for the security of the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) out to 1000 nautical miles from the Japanese Islands.<sup>4</sup> This requirement has lead Japan to build an impressive military force over the years, a fact that is watched closely by other nations in the region. Japan's defense establishment is, however, predominantly defensive in nature with no current capability for independent out of area operations .<sup>5</sup>

Fear of Japanese Militarization. In addition to securing Japan's interests, the alliance is viewed by some as a deterrent to Japanese militarism and evidence of U.S. commitment to the region. Admiral William Crowe, former commander of the Pacific Command , noted,

. . . the U.S.-Japan alliance does, in fact, ease the concerns of the Japanese themselves and other Asians about the future of Asian security. Above all, it helps dispel the impression that the United States might withdraw from Asia, leaving a vacuum that Japan might fill.<sup>6</sup>

It is not surprising, however, the emotion and concern the view of a militarized Japan brings out in the region-- memories of World War Two still linger in many Asian-Pacific countries and some are still awaiting an apology from Japan for its wartime behavior at the same time as they push for Japanese economic aid.<sup>7</sup>

Sharing the Burden. Japan is viewed by some in the U.S. and many other nations throughout the world as getting a free ride in the security arena at their expense. This was especially true during Desert Shield/Desert Storm when Japan promised \$13 billion for the war effort but would supply no troops or other military assets. This response was perceived by coalition members to be inadequate and slow in coming especially in view of the fact 90% of Japan's oil needs are met with Persian Gulf oil.\* As a result of outside pressure by the United States and others, Japan took the unprecedented action of authorizing deployment of minesweepers to the Persian Gulf after the war had ended. Just over one year later, Japan's national legislature surprised the world again when it authorizing deployment of ground combat support troops (primarily combat engineers) to take part in the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Cambodia. Japan in fact took the lead role in the peacekeeping effort. As expected, both these events were viewed by many nations in the Asia-Pacific region as the reemergence of a militaristic Japan.\* However, the international community tended to see Japan in a much more favorable light - Japan was finally fulfilling its global responsibilities with action instead of "checkbook diplomacy." Even the Japanese public appears to favor the peacekeeping mission for their military forces according to recent polls in Japan.<sup>10</sup>

Cost Sharing. Sharing the monetary burden of maintaining U.S. forces in Japan is by far the most contentious issue facing the alliance. Headway has been made in the area of "burden sharing" the cost of U.S. bases in Japan in recent years. Under a host nation support agreement signed in 1992, Japan's share of the total U.S. basing costs will rise from the current level of 35% (\$3.0 billion) to approximately 50% (\$3.8 billion) by 1995.<sup>11</sup> This level of cost sharing should go far in easing criticism from the U.S. Congress on the question of "burden sharing." Indications are that the Japanese government and public believe this latest agreement is a fair share for the security benefits they receive compared to benefits realized by the United States by having forward based naval forces.<sup>12</sup>

## CHAPTER V

### FORWARD BASING AND MISSION ACCOMPLISHMENT

Advantages to Forward Basing. As previously discussed, the United States is committed to staying engaged in the Asia-Pacific region politically, economically and militarily. Forward basing of naval assets offers the Pacific Command (PACOM) two key advantages in ensuring continued U.S. involvement in the region: continuous forward presence in the region and more rapid response to regional crisis situations than is offered by U.S. based assets.

Forward Presence. To meet a forward presence mission using U.S. based naval assets involves long transits to reach the region which impacts the actual on station time available to naval assets once in the region. To achieve reasonable fuel economy, and to permit flight operations en route if an aircraft carrier is involved, ships typically transit at a 14kt speed of advance (SOA). Based on a 14kt SOA, transit times make up 30% to 35% of the time for a deployment to the Indian Ocean and 17% of a deployment to the Western Pacific for U.S. based assets.<sup>1</sup> The above figures, show forward based assets gain a significant on station time advantage over U.S. based assets.

The lengthy transits required by U.S. based assets to reach the Asia-Pacific region also have a significant impact on personnel tempo (PERSTEMPO)--a morale issue which addresses

the time spent away from homeport. Current U.S. Navy policy dictates a PERSTEMPO of no more than 6 months deployed out of every 20 months and the 6 months of deployed time includes the transits to and from the homeport to the forward deployed area.<sup>2</sup> To meet the PERSTEMPO guidelines necessitates less time on station which in turn requires more assets unless a gap in the forward presence mission is deemed acceptable. Forward based assets, on the other hand, have considerably shorter transits and thus more on station time. Additionally, because forward based assets are already in the region, they logically fill a forward presence requirement in the area of their homeport even when inport at their forward based location.

Crisis Response. Closely associated with PACOM's forward presence mission is the requirement for appropriate response to crisis situations. The importance of crisis response is delineated in the *National Military Strategy of the United States*:

The capability to respond to regional crises is one of the key demands of our strategy. Regional contingencies we might face are many and varied, and could arise on very short notice. U.S. forces must therefore be able to respond rapidly to deter and, if necessary, to fight unilaterally or as part of a combined effort.<sup>3</sup>

The above arguments concerning lengthy transits from naval bases in the United States to the Asia-Pacific region to meet the presence mission are even more critical when applied to the need for crisis response. With forward based assets PACOM can provide the National Command Authority an additional and

import course of action for crisis response situations--assets on station in a minimum amount of time. The ability to respond more rapidly with assets stationed in the region could stabilize a crisis before it deteriorated to hostilities.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSIONS

The future of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region is inextricably tied to our relationship with Japan. Both countries have and will continue to benefit from a U.S. forward based presence in the region as do the rest of the Asian-Pacific countries. The U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty is the foundation of our relationship and has allowed the U.S. to influence the region politically and militarily for over four decades. The Treaty ensured Japan and the other countries of the region could concentrate primarily on economic growth while protected by the U.S. security umbrella.

Our presence on Japanese soil in the future will show other nations in the area, both allies and possible adversaries, of our resolve to stay engaged in the region. Additionally, a solid and continuing U.S. presence helps to defuse Asian concerns of a militarized and aggressive Japan returning to dominate the region. A permanent U.S. presence also would have a stabilizing effect on the escalating procurement of high technology arms by area militaries. Regional governments would not feel the need to increase military forces to control local waters, regional seas, and the SLOCs passing through them if U.S. forces were forward based in the region to discourage aggressive actions. If the United States stays, so does some semblance of regionally stability.



A withdrawal, on the other hand, would raise security concerns throughout the region and possibly lead to increased instability as countries postured to protect interests previously guaranteed by the United States either implicitly or explicitly. In view of the above security concerns, a U.S. departure or even a major force drawdown in the region is viewed with concern by nations in the Asia-Pacific region. Australia's Foreign Minister, Gareth Evans, noted,

In looking at security of the Asia-Pacific region, one still has to begin with the role of the U.S. simply because the continued strategic engagement of that country in the Western Pacific is vital to maintaining a stable security system in Asia for the foreseeable future. But, the important and enduring role is the reassurance the U.S. "balancing wheel" provides to regional powers allowing them to refrain from acquiring military force capabilities of a size that would prove destabilizing.<sup>1</sup>

As General John Galvin said, "This century taught us a lesson we should not forget: Because we can be drawn into crises in Asia, it is wiser for us to remain involved and influential in shaping the security of the region."<sup>2</sup> A forward based naval presence in Japan continues to be a relevant and key part of the military strategy to protect U.S. interests and ensure future access to the Asia-Pacific region.

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